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perceptions

Hello again!

That seems so strange to say, considering that this is the last place I expected to find myself. I thought I'd be sweating out my Bachelor program in Arizona. Oh, well. Time and chance. It really makes me smile, though, to have a second opportunity to edit this magazine. And the 1994 edition of *Perceptions* is really something. We've continued the new format from last year, but our confidence and versatility have grown. We have an enormous amount of talent here at Gainesville, and this issue brings you the best of the best. We had to forgo the projected interview in favor of running a third short story. Next year we'll just have to find more room. The poetry and the visual art round out the issue beautifully.

I'd like to rave about the team that brought it all together: faculty advisor Tom Sauret; art advisor, Anne Bessac; my virtuous twin from *hoi polloi*, Marlene Springston; Dr. Sallie Duhling, Dr. Tom Tuggle, Ann Purdy, Monique Kluczykowski, Barbara Thomas; and my assistant editor, Lucy Lawler.

A final personal note. I really AM moving on this year, and I want to take this space to thank everyone for the most amazing time that I've ever spent. There is simply not enough room to name all of the professors, administrators, division secretaries, and fellow students that have made such a profound difference in my life. They know who they are and that I love them.

I guess that about ties it up, except to say we had a blast putting this thing together; we hope you get one or two out of reading it.

Happy Trails!
Paul Hodo
Gainesville College
April 1994

peaches 5	marleen springston
margie elrod's workshed 11	joni susanne payne
the paper cut 12	bridget hogan
southern colloquials 13	james groome
indiana 14	angella kamminga
when charlie and junie dance 15	joni susanne payne
a gallery of visual art 20	
a once perfect daisy 34	alisha goodman
prosac 35	ty burgess
some gardeners i know 37	ron reach
the table 38	brian ross
haiku 39	marleen springston
alamein street revisited 40	candy sains

42 reunion
paul hodo

43 a nightcap for jeter
paul hodo

50 book review: *to find the gold* by susan ludvigson
paul hodo

peaches

marleen springston

first place: southern literary festival 1994

I don't eat peaches. I used to, but I don't anymore. People think I don't eat peaches since I was raised on a peach farm and probably tired of peaches, but that's not why I don't eat peaches. I admit we ate a lot of peaches. There were times when peaches were all we had to eat. More often though peaches got served with whatever we were eating. If we ate biscuits for breakfast, then we had peach jam too. It was special when we had milk and peaches but not because of the peaches. Sometimes I think I might like to start eating peaches again, but then I think of the bobcat and baby Julius.

I figured the only reason that bobcat had to come to our house was to eat us. Why else would a bobcat be in the peach orchard except to hunt something? And since he was staring at our window, he must be thinking about eating us. Our house was in the middle of an orchard. The house had three rooms in it. One room was the kitchen. One room was Mama and Papa's room. The other room was where me and my brothers and sisters slept. The first night I saw the bobcat there was a full moon. The moon was so close to our house that the light from it was bright enough to ripen things. I guess I woke up from the brightness. I sat up and just sort of casually looked out the window not expecting to see a bobcat. For a half of second I thought it was just a cat, but with the moon so bright it

was clearly a bobcat; little tufts of hair coming from its ears, fur and whiskers sticking straight out from the sides of its face, and a short stub for a tail. I rubbed my eyes again and again, figuring it really could not be standing there looking back at me. With only a tattered screen separating us, I decided to wake up Leon.

Leon was the oldest of us six children. He always got called upon to do things. That's why I woke him up. He was mad too. He wouldn't look out the window for nothing. When he finally believed that I was scared of something, even if it wasn't a bobcat, he looked out the window. And don't you know there was no sign of that bobcat! Leon slapped me good and told me to go back to sleep. There was no way I was going back to sleep. I knew I saw a bobcat and I wasn't about to go back to sleep and let it eat me or anyone else.

The bobcat didn't come every night but he came often enough for me to decide I better not sleep at night so I could keep watch. I thought if he knew someone was awake, then he wouldn't try to eat any of us. Night after night I would sit up waiting on that bobcat so he would know someone in our house was awake.

Sometimes when Leon shifted in the bed he would see me sitting up looking out the window. A couple times he asked, "Is he out there?" I'd say either yes or no depending on whether the bobcat was out there or not. A few of the times I said yes, Leon would get up to look. Not once would that bobcat let Leon see him. Leon told me that I was going crazy. I didn't like Leon thinking I was going crazy because I knew there really was a bobcat.

I started not getting much sleep at night. Mama started noticing too. She never saw me looking out the window but she saw me trying to sleep during the day. One time I was supposed to be shelling peas. I was sitting on the porch swing with a pot of peas in my lap. The other children were playing ox and tails on the step. An occasional breeze blew by, and I fell asleep. When I woke up, Mama had already shelled the peas, washed them, and had started them cooking. Mama's pillow was under my head. Here Mama was pregnant and already had six kids to tend and I couldn't even shell some peas. Mama came over and patted me on the head. She said, "Neda, you sleep as much during the day as a cat." Old dumb Leon heard her and said, "Neda keeps a bobcat watch every night so we won't all get eaten." Mama got the whole story and told Papa when he got home.

Papa looked for tracks but never saw any. He said, "The clay is so hard packed I didn't figure we'd see any." Leon started to tell Papa how crazy I was when Papa stopped Leon short and told Leon to "Run and get Jigsy from your Uncle Lem. Lem lost two chickens last week. Said it was a fox. Could be that bobcat Neda's been seeing."

We were just finishing up dinner: blackeyed peas, cornbread, sweet tea, and peaches, when Leon came back with Uncle Lem and Jigsy. Jigsy was on a rope. Papa and Uncle Lem had plenty of luck hunting with Jigsy. Jigsy was a red hound dog that had a reputation for sniffing out wild animals. Mama poured Papa and Uncle Lem some coffee, then we all went outside to see if Jigsy would smell anything.

Jigsy barely got around the corner of the house when he picked up the bobcat scent. Jigsy went straight to the spot where the bobcat usually stood. Jigsy walked all along the bordering peach trees. Papa said, "The bobcat must walk right along the border in case it needs to get back into the orchard for cover." Jigsy's nose stayed to the ground, moving left then right. All of a sudden Jigsy yanked Uncle Lem straight toward the house. Jigsy was smelling all around underneath the window I look out of every night. Jigsy jumped up putting his two front paws on the house. It looked like he was trying to climb into the window. He kept scratching and jumping on the side of the house like he treed something.

Mama gathered up the children to get them inside. I went with her. Leon stayed with Papa and Uncle Lem.

I didn't get much sleep that night even though Uncle Lem left Jigsy to protect us. Jigsy stayed tied up right underneath our window. I had not seen the bobcat for a week when Uncle Lem came for Jigsy. Uncle Lem said we could have Jigsy back any time we needed her. Uncle Lem also said, "Won't no bobcat be coming around with Jigsy's scent everywhere."

The first night Jigsy was gone the bobcat came. I didn't wake up Leon or Papa. I didn't move. I just stared at the bobcat and he stared at me. The next morning Papa asked if I had seen the bobcat. I told him yes. He couldn't find any tracks. He began asking me nearly every morning if I had seen the bobcat last night. I would tell him yes or no according to whether I had or not.

Then there was this one night in particular. There wasn't a full moon, but in the orchard the stars are so close to the ground that everything is lit up enough to where you can see pretty good. The bobcat hadn't been by but that was probably because of all the commotion

happening while Mama was bringing baby seven into the world. Papa had sent Leon for help.

Granny came. Granny would have been enough because she knew a lot about having babies and she knew a lot about God. Sister Evelyn and Reverend Jones came too.

Sister Evelyn is married to Reverend Jones. Sister Evelyn likes Leon in a good way. She paid him attention in ways nobody else did. She told Leon about Caesar and Rome and Greece. One time I heard her tell Leon that Caesar was born in 100 B.C. and died in 44 B.C. Leon said, "How can somebody die before the year they were born?" Sister Evelyn said, "Time is measured according to when Jesus was born. The years before Jesus count down and the years after Jesus count up." Leon looked interested in whatever she talked to him about.

A whole bunch of other holy women came too: Cousin Sara, Cousin Angie, Aunt Bertie, Aunt Eilene and Sister Hattie, and a few strays came along probably for the interestingness of it all.

I decided Leon must have found Sister Hattie at the Creek Dock. He is not supposed to go to the Creek Dock for anything or Mama said she would "rip his lips off." I never even knew there was a place called the Creek Dock until I heard Mama and Papa talking once when they didn't know I was listening. Papa was drunk and said he had been at the Creek Dock. He said he never would have gotten home if it hadn't been for Sister Hattie. Mama asked how Sister Hattie knew to help him home and Papa said that Sister Hattie didn't only "sing in the choir." I figured that meant she sang at the Creek Dock too. Mama told Papa to stay away from Sister Hattie because ever since Sister Hattie's husband died Hattie has been on the prowl for another. Papa couldn't have heard Mama though because he was still humming the tune to the song he was singing when Sister Hattie had brought him up to the house: "O...dem golden slippers. O...dem golden slippers ...golden slippers I'm gonna wear to walk dem golden streets."

I didn't see Leon come back from getting help. I figured he was having some sort of adventure at the Creek Dock what with Mama and Papa distracted for a while.

Even though the baby hadn't arrived, things started to settle down a bit. The young children fell asleep after a time. When Mama's pains got closer, I thought the children would surely wake up, but they slept right through Mama hollering and the holy hostesses shouting, "Jesus, Jesus,

Jesus!" When the holy hostesses weren't shouting they, would come out of Mama's room only to turn around and go right back in. The door never stayed open long enough or wide enough for me to get a good look at Mama.

Mama was having such a hard time with number seven. I couldn't remember a time when she had to holler so much. The holy hostesses were praying for God to "deliver that baby" and Mama too. When the pace of the praying and hollering changed a little bit, I knew the baby was almost here. I heard Granny say to give Mama some air and back away to where Mama could breathe better. Granny said, "I can feel his head, now push Sister. Push!" Mama growled almost. She was groaning like Papa does when he tries to move the mule. When Mama let go of her groan, I could tell that she was relieved, but I didn't hear the baby cry.

It had never been quieter in the orchard. Papa said, "Granny?" Granny said, "Lord, please Lord. Please. Please Lord. No."

I opened the door to Mama's room and saw Papa take hold of number seven. Papa held the baby close to Mama. Papa was crying like I had never seen before. Mama started heaving like she couldn't breathe. The holy hostesses pulled Mama back from the baby and fanned on Mama telling her it was going to be all right. Sister Evelyn had her arm around Granny. Papa started crying big. He shook and shook. Reverend Jones went to Papa and tried to calm him. The Reverend said, "Jeb, help me baptize him." The Reverend said it again and all of a sudden Papa stopped shaking. Papa held the baby toward Reverend Jones. The Reverend took some bloody water from Granny's basin. Reverend Jones didn't take his eyes off Papa and Papa didn't take his eyes off Reverend Jones. While Papa held the baby, the Reverend poured red water on the baby and said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Papa still stared at Reverend Jones. Papa handed number seven to me and said, "Bury him yonder." The Reverend grabbed a hold to Papa and turned him toward Mama. I held the baby and walked outside. I walked with a mission. I walked like it was normal for me to carry a baby to the shed for a shovel.

I set the baby down while I started digging a few feet from the trunk of a peach tree. Papa never said where yonder was so I dug seven trees out from the porch.

I leaned over to pick up Julius and saw the bobcat standing two

trees away. I didn't hear the bobcat come, but I never did. Instead of picking Julius up, I laid down next to him. I drew him in close. I blew on him. He didn't move. I told him about Leon and Mama and Jesus. I told him how to shell peas. I told him how to play ox and tails. I told him how to pick peaches. I told him it was okay to be afraid of bobcats, but I wasn't. I sang to him. "O...them golden slippers... O...them golden slippers ... golden slippers you're gonna wear to walk them golden streets."

I looked up at the bobcat. His eyes were that night reflecting yellow color. He had black rings around his stubby tail. He was mostly grey like the bark on the peach trees. He stood like he was getting ready to leave or maybe spring at me. My heart was pounding so hard I felt like the whole world could hear it. I asked him, "Why did you come here?" He just stood frozen. "Where are you going to go now?" He never even flinched. He just stood very still and stared back at me. I looked down at Julius for not more than a second and when I looked back up, the bobcat had disappeared. I tried to listen for him walking through the orchard, but all I could hear was my heart.

Come the next harvest, Julius had the best tree; the biggest peaches ever, and sweet! That's what Leon said.

margie elrod's work shed

joni susanne payne

Raising the chipped paint windows
I watch the shed
Mamma Margie in her work house
The clapboard room lit by a single, hanging light bulb.
The breeze lifts my gown
Blows my small face

Running into the dark
Cinderella without shoes or song.
The dewy grass between my toes
To the doorway, where
Mama Margie cleans the heads and sweeps the dust.

Walls and shelves of busts
The kiln blasts heat through the door
Ceramic blue eyes stare at my cornflower gown
Scraps of cloths.
Smiling, speaking to her dolls.

Spring comes with her hands,
Molding ceramic toes and ears
Creating the doll
That will come to me
So I can touch
The colors of green.

the paper cut

bridget hogan

Beaten into a workable medium,
 Its fibers soon woven by artful hands.
 The metamorphosis from plant to material astounds us all.
 At the five and dime, I purchase the parcel
 Bound into rolls, evenly sheared.

Carefully, I untie the stiff brown bow.
 Billowing sheets float to the ground in slow motion.
 Smooth white cut transformed by the unyielding surface
 Blood swells into a puddle on my fingertip.

Isn't it always so?

southern colloquials

james groome

I wear the hand-me-down countenances of my
 Grandfather like an old pea coat in winter.
 Eloquent voices of the South like:
 I'm sick as a yellow dog,
 Grits is South Carolina ice cream,
 He is strong as a white mule
 And up-to-par and
 Katie bar. . .
 Embellish my stride.

My children will fit snug
 into these anthems.
 They'll know that if you cut
 the head off of a snapping turtle
 And nail it to an old tree
 and touch a pair of pliers to his beak,
 he will snap it out of your hand
 and won't let go 'til lightning strikes.

Let the thunder and lightning
 haunt the Southern sky,
 so I can use the pliers again
 to fix the closed-faced reel for tomorrow.
 I'll go to the pond and hope
 a dragonfly lands on my rod to rest.

indiana

angella kamminga

I grew up in Indiana
 where the land is rich,
 the crops, plentiful.
 Farmers abound. Straight as arrows,
 far as the horizon, rows of corn,
 soybeans,
 tobacco,
 wheat,
 strawberries,
 blueberries,
 you name it, they grow it.

I grew up in Indiana
 where the sidewalk sale is
 the epiphany of summer.
 Housewives rise at the crack of dawn,
 summon children, rush through breakfast, race
 to town, buzzing like bees over a honeycomb.
 Pick the remains of racks of clothes,
 tables of cloth,
 baskets of shoes,
 blankets,
 you name it, they sell it.

I grew up in Indiana
 where it's important to grow up,
 get married,
 have children,
 save money,
 buy a home, and
 a full set of china. But,

I didn't want that.

when charlie and junie dance

joni suzanne payne

It might have been all right, but for the dancing. On Junie's ninth birthday, Grandy gave him an old radio that had sat in the front room for years. Charlie was surprised because he'd lived eleven years just down the road from Grandy and had yet to receive a present of any kind. Grandy wasn't given to gestures of sentimentality. Junie, short for James, wasn't sure what to say, so when Mom kicked him under the table, he muttered a perfunctory "Thank you." But Junie was excited. They had never owned a radio and Junie stared at the knobs and dial and asked Charlie to set it up in their bedroom that night.

"Maybe we can listen to it while Mom's at work," said Junie.

"Maybe the radio stations only broadcast until time for us to go to bed, dumbass."

Since Charlie was the older brother, he had control of the home while Mom worked or slept, caring for Junie and their mother, seeing to every aspect of their lives. When their father left years ago, the burden of raising Junie had fallen, unequivocally, to Charlie. Dressing Junie, feeding Junie, waking Junie, or talking Junie to sleep after bad dreams. That was Charlie's life. Junie was Charlie's.

"Besides, that'll waste electricity," Charlie added.

Charlie thought Junie was pretty good for a little brother, but he

just couldn't get over the fact that Grandy had given up this radio. When Charlie was eight, he watched his father walk down the road with his mom chasing behind, screaming. When she returned, Junie was sent to Grandy's house to spend the night.

"But, Mom. I want to go to Grandy's. Junie's way too little."

But Charlie had to stay home. He had to be the man. It seemed that when Grandy cared to think about it, he would be extra nice to Junie. Take Junie fishing a couple of times a year, or even show Junie how to shoot a gun. Of course Charlie always went, too. But Junie was invited. And now, the radio.

The first day of the radio, Charlie got in trouble. He couldn't find a station, so Junie kept turning the volume up while Charlie spun the dial.

"Make it work, Charlie."

Charlie found the station and it screamed so loud that the music couldn't be understood. Before Charlie could turn the radio down, his mom came tearing out of her bedroom.

"Goddammit, Charlie. I'm sleeping. Don't you know I'm sleeping?" She slammed back into her room and Charlie turned off the radio and sat down on the floor, staring at Junie. Their mom worked the third shift at the cotton mill a mile away. Some mornings Charlie had to wrap his mother's fingers to stop the trickles of blood left from spinning the cotton thread onto spools. Junie tried to hug the radio and began to cry. Charlie wanted to hit Junie in the face.

After that, Charlie let Junie listen when supper was cleared and school stuff done, up until bedtime. Junie would lie on the floor and stare at the wooden box like it was their black and white T.V. before it blew the tube. Charlie didn't get it.

"Jesus, Junie. It's just a radio, for cryin' out loud," Charlie would say. But Junie would only smile at him and pat the radio like it was a friend. Or a dog that left home and returned cold and wounded. And hungry.

The radio wasn't that hot. It only picked up one local station and that not very well. But every night, they caught the Top Ten. Junie liked anything fast, but his favorite song was "Chantilly Lace" by The Big Bopper. Every night when it came on, Junie would put his ear right up to the speaker and laugh. Charlie liked slower ballads like "I Only Have Eyes For You" by the Flamingos. And anything by the Platters. "Only

You" and "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" were Charlie's all-time favorites, but he would not tell Junie that. Listening to these slow, calm songs, Charlie would lie on his bunk and try to think about a time before. Before, it all belonged to him. Charlie would close his eyes and wish. Junie would begin talking about the songs and how they came out of the radio.

"I think the guys who sing fly in a helicopter to the top of the transmitter and get out and sing and it goes all over. I just don't get how they can sing so fast. I mean, it must be pretty small at the top. How do they fit and move quick enough to start the next song, Charlie?" Charlie ignored Junie and lay on his bed, listening.

A few days later, after school, Charlie walked Junie through the woods until they could see the AM transmitter. It looked so small that Junie had to re-think his ideas on how the radio worked and the songs played. On the way home, Junie fell into a slicky mud spot, and Charlie had to scrub and wash the clothes before their mom woke up to get ready for work. Charlie wanted to beat Junie. To stand over Junie, screaming and slapping, while Junie washed out his own clothes. But Charlie only sat away from the house with a brush and a bucket of soapy water, so his mom wouldn't wake.

It was a cooling autumn night when Junie started on the dancing.

"Just teach me how, Charlie. Just one song. Nobody'll see us."

Charlie didn't want to admit that he didn't know anything about dancing. He didn't go to dances at school and had really only seen people dancing a couple of times on the T.V. before it busted.

"What do you care about that for? That's girl stuff. You want to grow up homo or something?"

"Naw, come on Charlie. It'll be good. I won't tell anybody."

Charlie finally stood up and the brothers faced one another on the oval-shaped rug.

"Now, I ain't doing any of that slow shit, so don't even try it."

But Junie didn't care. He liked faster stuff anyway. It was pretty clumsy starting, but they got enough going to weave and shuffle through "Get A Job" and "Green Onions" and rested when "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" came on. Charlie went to his top bunk and thought about when his father sat in the dark corner of the living room. At dusk, all you could see was the glowing tip of his cigar. They tried some more songs, and when it was time to go to bed, Charlie felt let down.

"Maybe we can try again tomorrow night. See how it goes," Charlie said.

Then he and Junie lay in bed giggling and talking about things that didn't matter.

The next night after supper, Charlie and Junie washed the dishes hurriedly, so impatient for their mom to leave that Charlie let Junie drop a glass and bust it. Charlie swept the linoleum floor while his mom glared at him. For the first time, Charlie was secretly glad his mom worked the third shift. Usually, his brows would go down as he locked the door behind her, but tonight he was nervous, anxious for her to go away and leave them to the radio. Junie watched her through the sheer curtains and reported her down the road and out of sight. The boys ran into their room and turned on the radio.

Night after night, they got to bed later than they should. Charlie stopped making Junie do homework. Both brothers put their full concentration into the radio. After school, the brothers would go to the woods behind the house and dance with the pine trees, singing and laughing together until time to start supper. For the first time in his whole life, Charlie stopped watching Junie. Because they were together in waiting for the radio, Charlie felt freer than he could remember. Everything stopped but the radio. Until Junie turned off Charlie's favorite song.

They were dancing to the Del-Vikings' "Come Go With Me." It was already so late, but Charlie didn't want to go to bed. If they cut school tomorrow, who'd know? Charlie wanted to live in his room, dancing to the radio, until nothing existed. No cleaning, no work, no mom, no brother to raise. Everything would leave. Like Dad. Only Charlie and the radio to keep the next morning away. "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" and Charlie smiled and began his ritual climb to the top bunk. He closed his eyes and wished he could live with this song forever.

Then, Charlie heard nothing. He opened his eyes and saw Junie playing with the knobs.

"Let's find another station with something fast on it," Junie said.

Charlie jumped off of the bed and pushed Junie onto the floor. Charlie began spinning the dial frantically, searching for his song. Junie slapped Charlie on the back and screamed at him, "Leave it alone! It's my radio. Grandy gave it to me. He wanted me to listen to whatever I want."

Charlie left the radio and began punching blindly at Junie. Striking at his dirty face and clothes. Charlie felt that he was beating his own child, but he didn't care anymore. That had been his favorite song, all alone. But it wouldn't work anymore. No song would make his life stop, Charlie knew. When Charlie stopped hitting, he could only hear Junie crying and the static of the radio.

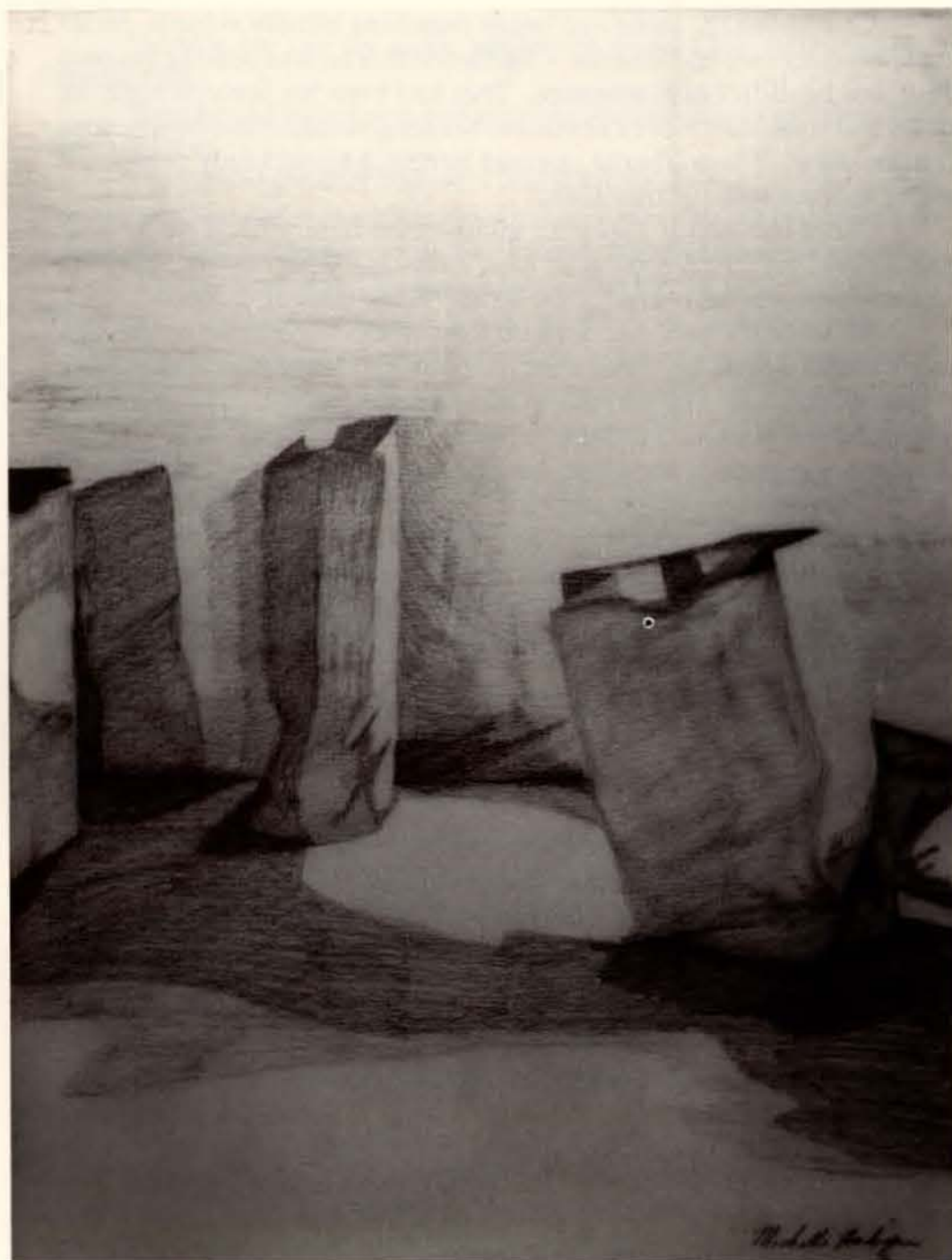
"Keep it! Keep it! Play your goddamned radio and dance by your goddamned self. And cook your food and wash your clothes. Play the fucking radio, for all I care." Charlie sat on the floor and cried.

Junie didn't turn on the radio for a week. Charlie sat on the bed and pretended to do his homework, but watched Junie stare at the radio, or even worse, try to hug the radio. One afternoon, Junie cut his finger and when Charlie came to bandage it, Junie jerked his hand away. When Charlie could stand it no longer, he told Junie to turn on some music.

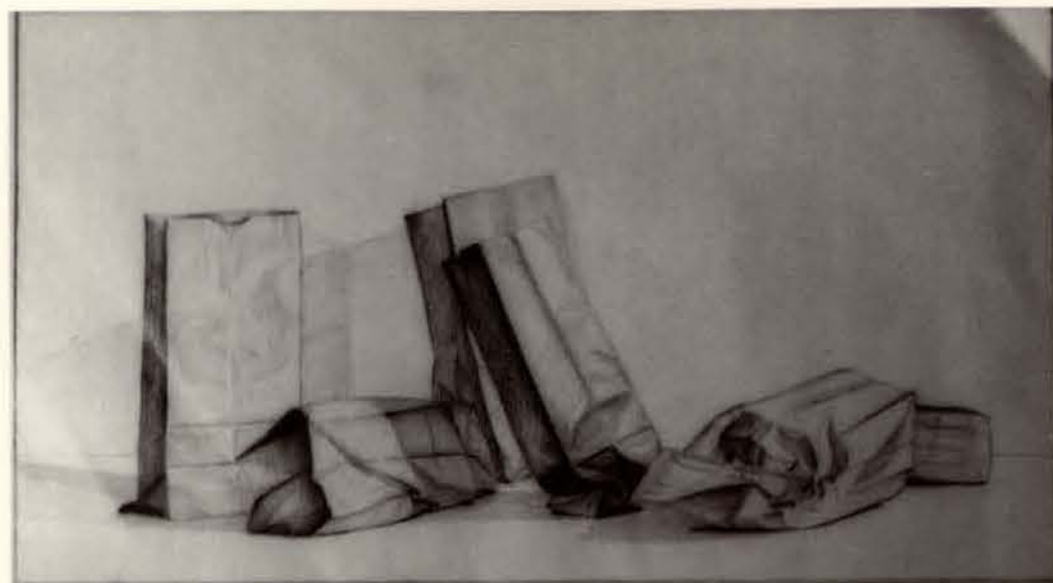
"Hey, June, go ahead and turn it on if you want. I'm sorry I yelled at you. It'll be O.K." And still, Charlie knew it wouldn't be O.K. again. He wasn't sure what had happened to him, screaming and beating Junie like that, but Charlie guessed Junie knew that he didn't want to be the dad anymore. Junie just sat in the floor and ignored Charlie. Charlie stood and walked to his brother.

"I'll still keep you, Junie. I'll always keep you." Charlie walked to the radio and turned it on. "Come on. Let's dance a couple, Junie." But Junie only sat with no expression. Like he couldn't hear the music playing.

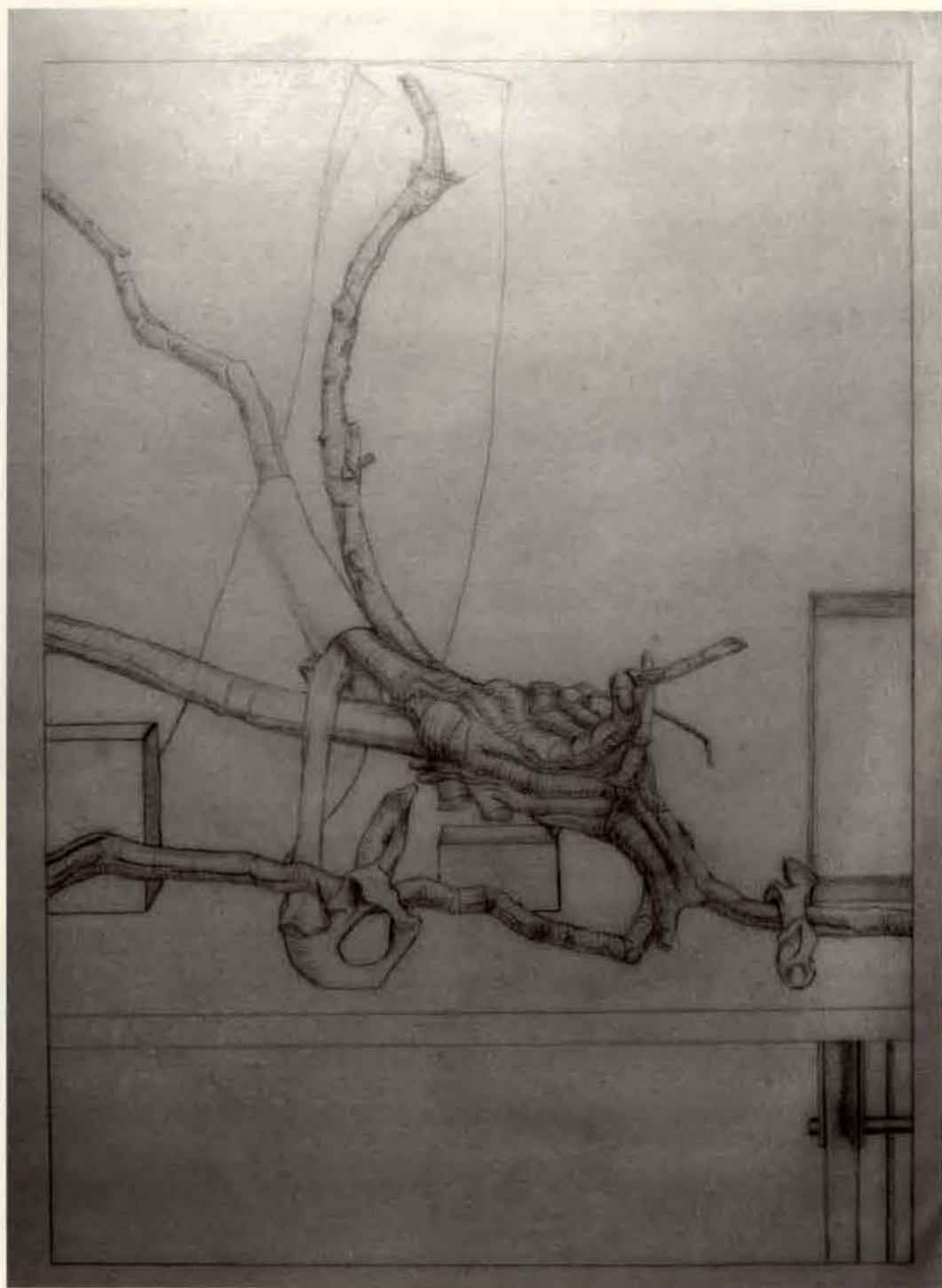
"Junie, get up. I'm not mad anymore. Come on, just a couple of songs." Charlie hated the hollow look on Junie's face. Charlie wondered if he ever looked that way. Maybe when his dad left. "Please, Junie. Goddammit! Get off your ass." But Junie only acted like he was deaf. Like he couldn't hear Charlie any more than he could hear Grandy's radio. But Charlie knew that Junie could hear. Junie could hear everything.



third prize
michelle hardigree
graphite
17" x 23"



ken halverson
graphite
20" x 12"



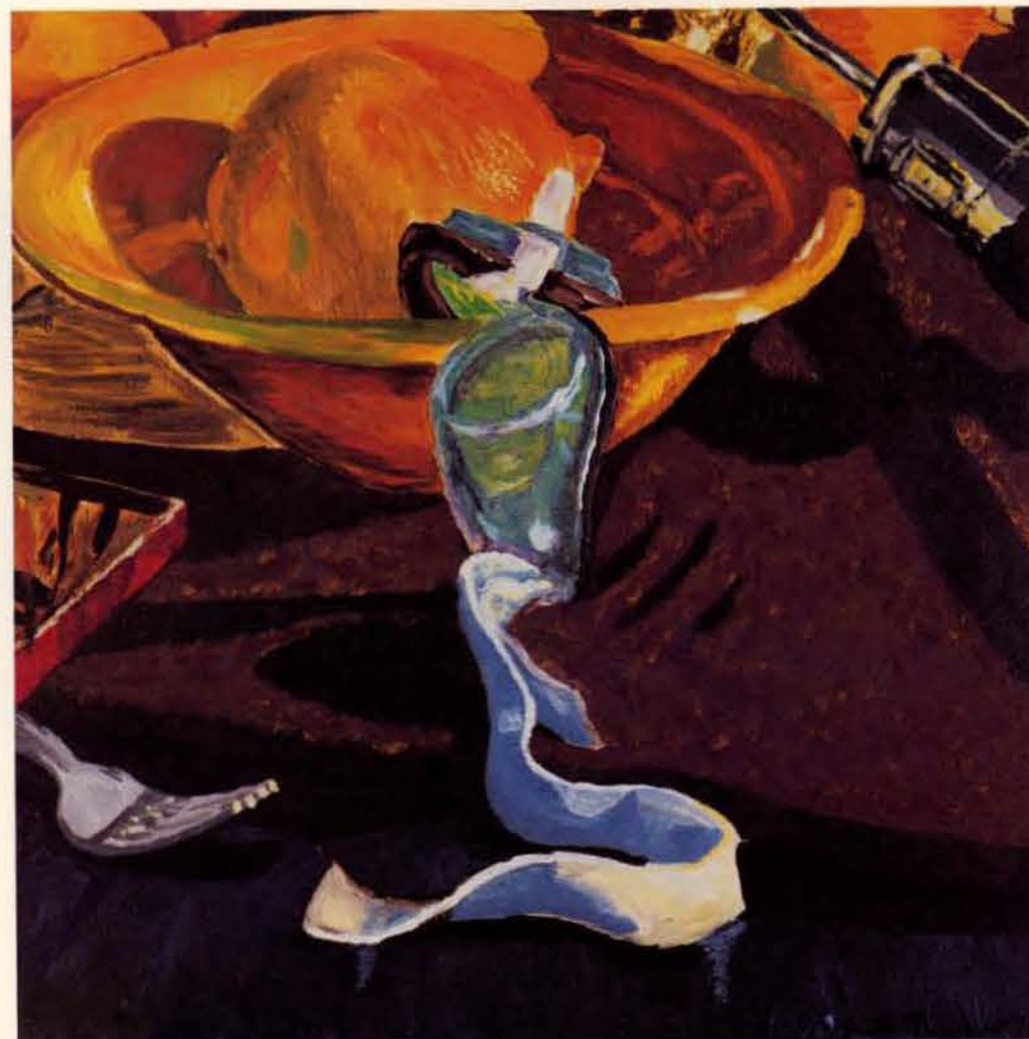
ken halverson
graphite
14" x 20"



diana m. dyer
watercolor
13" x 9"



sean berry
conte crayon
16" x 14"



justin mayhew
oil
24" x 24"



first prize

justin mayhew

oil

30" x 20"



second prize

david vanvalkenburg

watercolor and ink

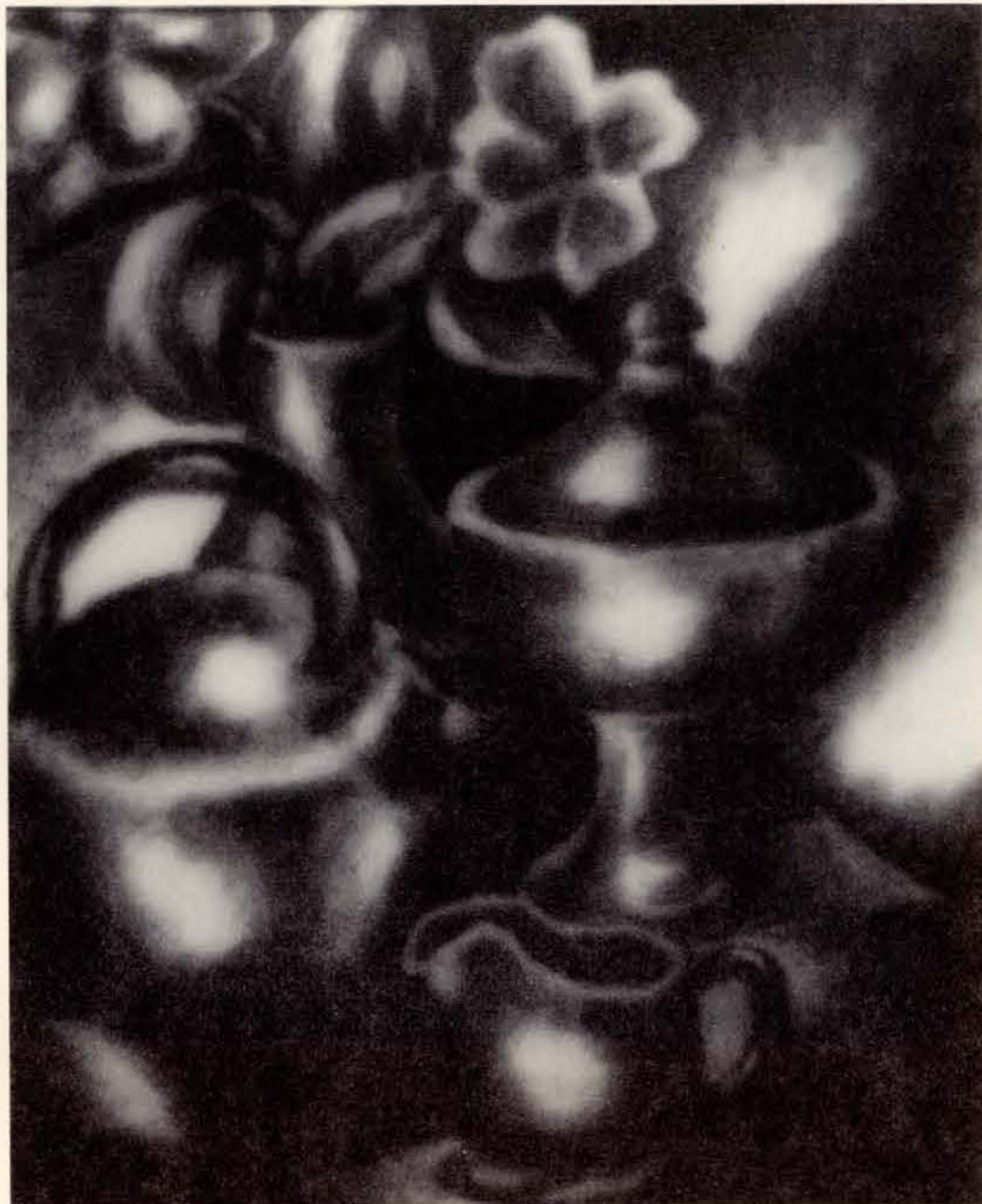
16" x 13"



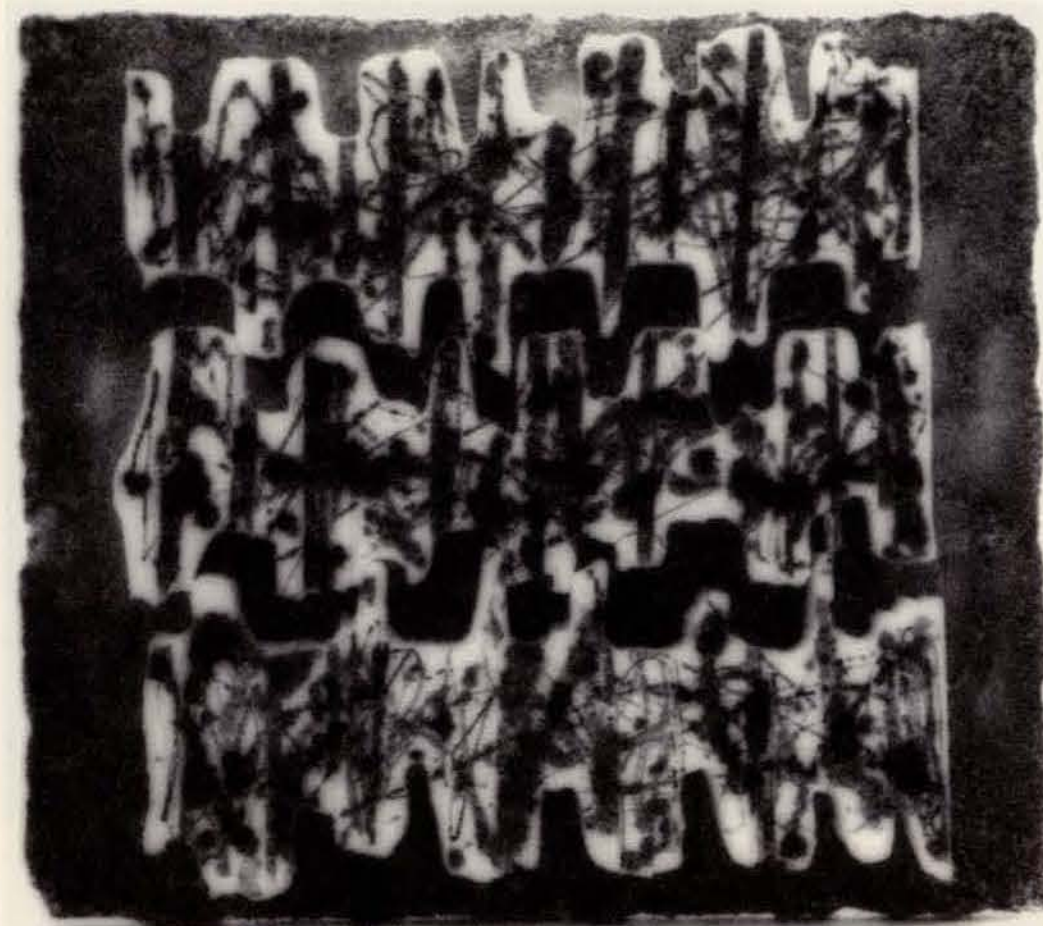
david vanvalkenburg
 ink wash
 13" x 14"



laura simpson
 graphite
 17" x 14"



debbi martin
conte crayon
14" x 17"



laura simpson
styrofoam relief
25" x 26" x 4"



debbi martin
computer graphic
10" x 7"



laura simpson
wood sculpture
21" x 18" x 18"

a once perfect daisy*alisha goodman*

A single milk petal,
 Clinging to a sad, fallow face
 Is all that remains
 Of a once perfect daisy.
 He loves me not.

prozac*ty burgess*

walked into
 a mirage
 from the scene
 of a blind movie
 and
 the ghosts
 of the past
 were fire
 and
 sadness
 something about
 this season
 and
 the short days
 it brings.

prolonged darkness
 vision obscured
 stable unfocus
 speaking appearance
 to sunshine women
 with illusions
 of heat
 perfumed and
 annointed
 guys love
 a girl
 who can drive
 a stick
 something about
 the way
 that cigarette

hangs d
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poised on
 the edge
 of triumph
 slowly burning
 itself
 into thoughtless
 extinction
 where truth
 merges into
 fiction
 w/no harmful
 side-effects

some gardeners i know

ron reach

Under ancient spires, complacent roses bloom;
 Six tipsy, flatulent, sunburned monks on knees
 Pull weeds from a well-kept Cardinal's tomb.
 Bells call, night cools summer's cruelty; wind in trees--
 Rain streaks full-moonlight, as soft, diamond shards pelt
 Stained-glass windowpanes; six hooded figures muse
 At poker hands; like rogue pirates, playing cards
 And records, Howlin' Wolf's cold, beer-drinkin' blues.
 As demons overtake their sense and sight,
 Six go to bed, and all have revelations:
 St. Peter visits each, in turn that night,
 And scolds them for unruly jubilations;
 Then tells each foolish heart, "God grants you pardon,
 Because you've worked, and kept a lovely garden."

the table

brian ross

The table stood in the living room
And breathed its grain into the air.
Its legs were long and curved
In Elizabethan style.
Its dark oak finish blended with
The dismal material world surrounding it.
A loving table, it begged to
Be polished and caressed.

I remember going to the park
To watch the wild tables roam around.
Some, if it were a good day,
Would come right up and let you
Rest a cup or a plate on them.
How I wanted a table of my very own.

That was long ago.
I last saw that table behind an old garage.
I think it was on drugs,
Probably hooked on polish or something.
Needle scratches covered
Its lumber surface.
My father warned me about
Abused tables, but I wanted to
Take it home anyway.

I bent over to pick it up,
But it just stood there lurking in the shadow.
Its legs were wobbly and
It could hardly stand on its own.
The glue was brittle with age,
And I knew it didn't have very long.
I put it out of its misery
With my axe, and now its limbs
Are warming my living room.

haiku

marleen springston

It's crowded in the
center of the universe
where we sit wanting.

alamein street revisited

candy sains

The sun was softly mellowed then
the wind blew warm and sickly sweet,
recalled in a breath over tar and stone
Normandy, Dunkirk, and Alamein Street.

And early each morning spilling from brick houses
chordant voices hung like a prayer,
ghosts of bright summer days long past
the children of Alamein Street.

Come out you kids
come out you kids,
come out in the street to play.

But hidden lies the bleak chill of winter,
the pit that runs dark runs deep;
and as each cry of despair wells in each nightmare
we stand again
in Alamein Street.

And was that man really screwing his daughters?
those pale freckled girls whose shattered smiles
whisper within the hollow of the conch shell
with soft female voices that sob even now,
at night in Alamein Street.

Come out you kids
come on out you kids,
come out in the street to play.

For dearest I knew then that you loved me
your soul welded in poverty to mine,
as barefoot we wandered through worlds of bright treasure
found under chickweed and corrugated iron.

Christ put that bottle down can't you
listen!
and throw the bloody needle away,
I'll screech in your ear that I love you
with you cradled in my arms
I'll pray;
and drumming as my strength flows through you
echoes of the child in the street
that skips rope
skips rope
feet crashing down where we lay.

Come out you bastards
come on out you bastards!
get out in the street and PLAY.

It's odd but I swear that this morning
with the sun sweating limp on your sheets,
I heard from the street a voice calling
the small boy for whom love
and not time
is the thief.

reunion

paul hodo

I'm a Georgia boy, deep-rooted.
The rush of a mountain stream and
the span-jangle run of banjo music
are the double helix of my being.

*Sit down, boy. . . sit
and listen to the summer.
Smell the earth, taste the life.*

Few letters, little news
since my folks divorced.
Twenty years lost
following a different path.

*Your granddaddy loved you, boy.
He never forgot.
It's your blood, let it flow, feel the life.*

So many yesterdays gone.
We are, all of us, together for a day.
And the words fill me like music,
like a heartbeat.

*O yes, boy, we're always here.
Love is an endless river, and deep.
You can't get too far away.
Sing to me, boy. Sing the life.*

a nightcap for jeter

paul hodo

Excerpt from The Atlanta Journal 11-23-92:
30 YEAR OLD MYSTERY RESURFACES IN DREDGING OPERATION
ATLANTA SAYS: PEPSI, PLEASE!

...

The billboard was a freaking work of art. A forty-foot Pepsi bottle eternally filling a frosty glass while the huge bottlecap turned flips overhead. It was a bold move by the Pepsi people. Atlanta was and is the city that was built by Coke. The billboard was a splashy, defiant smack in the chops from the also-rans. And it had to have cost a fortune. It had taken almost two months to raise the iron framework that would support the God-sized beverage above the Piggly Wiggly at the corner of Piedmont and Lindbergh. Jeter, Shasteen, and I watched the wonder take shape from the patio of Zesto's every day after school. The thing was still three weeks away from animation when Jeter first hinted at a project. It was on the day that they lifted the bottlecap into place. Two workmen were busy attaching the six-foot disc to the motorized spindle that would cause it to flip. They were able to jockey the thing around without any overt difficulty, so it must have been made of something light.

"Probably fiberglass," Shasteen decided.

"Yeah," Jeter added absently. "Sucker'd make a great little raft. Wonder what it would take to get it down?"

"Hell, Jeter. King Kong would get a nosebleed climbing that bugger!" I laughed. "And what, for pity's sake, would you do with it when you got it down? Stick it in your back-seat?"

"Shit, Pinner. It was just a thought," he grumbled. "C'mon, let's blast off," he added and walked off toward the car.

Just a thought.

Oh yeah.

If it had been anybody else, I would have accepted that answer and forgotten the whole thing. But, during the days that followed, Jeter grew more and more restless, more focused. I knew that he had become obsessed with the notion of snagging that bottlecap. Whenever Jeter was

working out the particulars of a project, he turned into a shitheel of the first water. He'd walk around all hunched up, with his hands shoved into his pockets. When things were really complex, he would forego personal hygiene and bury himself in mountains of notes and diagrams. In other words, he was hell to live with. I'd had enough.

"O.K., Jeter. You want the sonofabitch? Let's get it. I'm sick of you walking around with a turd in your pocket. Let's just get the damn thing and sail it to Fiji," I told him.

For the first time in days, Jeter smiled. He slapped me on the back and chuckled.

"I knew I could count on you, Pinner," he said. "You're as crazy for this as I am. I figure we'll need one more guy."

...

The "one more guy" ended up being Shasteen. Not my first choice. Like we really had a choice. Don't get me wrong. He was my next to best friend, after Jeter. We'd grown up together, but Shasteen had a unique set of circumstances that frequently got all of us into a world of trouble. When Consolidated Digitech opened its Southern Division, all three of our families were transferred from D.C. to Atlanta. Shasteen's father, the whiz at M.I.T.'s newly-formed computer think tank, was the head of the operation. This was news, especially in the South. The Shasteens were black. It didn't matter that Mr. Shasteen had played golf with Ike or that he had been a guest at Hyannisport; he was a Negro. Since we had been in Atlanta, he had been seen, several times, in the paper in the company of one Dr. King. This celebrity was transferred, sadly, onto his heir. Our "one more guy." Shasteen had been speedily elected the "Student Most Likely To Be Lynched" at Tucker High, but had miraculously escaped the ravening redneck hoards by the mercy that God grants the ignorant. While Shasteen did not have much in the way of street-smarts and was absolutely the wrong flavor for Southern tastes, he did have a brand new '61 Corvette. The local hilljacks had a deep Puritan reverence for fine automobiles. Thus, Shasteen was a minor deity at school. With Jeter seated on the rear deck, we were Todd, Buzz, and--I don't know--Shemp, as we tooled around Buckhead.

Anyhow, the project was sweet. Simplicity and poetry at once. Jeter would secure a summer job at Piggly Wiggly and become our inside man. On the designated night, he would let Shasteen and me through the

back door at closing time. We would hide out in a storeroom until everybody had clocked out. Then, with rented block and tackle, we would climb through a ceiling hatch just below the billboard. After cutting the power and scaling the framework, we would secure the cap and lower it into the alley where a U-Rent pickup would be idling. Then we would drive to Johnson's Ferry Landing, on the Chattahoochee River, and make the historic voyage to Power's Ferry. We would then swamp the craft, with full honors, and escape in Shasteen's 'vette.

Piece of cake! 1-2-3 and we're gone. Jeter had outdone himself. Jeter got the job. Jeter mapped out the project and perfected the timing. Jeter set the date for a dry run. Jeter fell ass-over-elbows in love with Tamara Sue Tinsley.

Oh yeah.

Tamara Sue Tinsley was something to behold. A twenty-three year old divorcee, she possessed the stuff of every boy's dream. True blonde hair. Pixie face. Breasts like bumper-bullets on a '57 Olds. And just enough of a brain to assure essential motor skills. Beyond all belief, she was smitten with lust for Jeter. On his part, having sustained a frustrating series of incursions into the chaste world of Bible Belt dating, Jeter was more than ready to accept her beneficence. Unfortunately, in a fit of stupidity, he spilled every damned bean. Plucky lass that she was, Tamara Sue insisted on participating in the project.

Oh yeah.

As it turned out, we needed her. The night of the dry run, Shasteen tripped over a mop-pail and sprained his ankle. Since we needed three people aloft, he became the getaway driver. Tamara Sue replaced him on the roof. It was providential that Jeter had insisted on a trial run because we encountered a couple of delays, and time was our enemy. We made it onto the roof and located the sign's power source without incident. However, our plan to have Tamara Sue stationed at the base of the framework to belay the block and tackle had to be scrapped. We discovered that the only way to reach the two bolts holding the bottlecap in place was by standing on the spillway secreted behind the bottle. The monumental illusion was ingenious. Behind the stationary soda glass, we found a large reservoir filled with a dark brown liquid. The liquid was pumped up to a second tank attached to the bottle. When the bottle tipped, the liquid flowed into a 36 inch-wide tube that sent it cascading into the glass and back to the first reservoir. There was a 2 foot

shunt at the end of the tube that served in dispersing the liquid as it began its freefall. It was on that meager platform that we would have to stand in order to harness the bottlecap. We would only be able to reach the bolts if the bottle were halted in pouring position. We would have to find something to staunch the flow of liquid from the tube while we were on the shunt. That something would be Tamara Sue Tinsley.

...

Three nights later, we moved. Operation Nightcap. Shasteen's idea. When the last employee left the store, we came out of hiding and gathered our equipment. Jeter and I carried the block and tackle; Tamara Sue had the tool-kit and a jar of Vaseline. We got to the roof and jimmied the door to the electric box minutes ahead of schedule. By the time I had cut the power, Jeter and Tamara Sue were halfway up the ladder to the spillway. When they reached the top, Jeter tossed one end of the tackle down to me and I tied it to the framework. Then, I hurried up the ladder. I had cut the juice at the precise moment that the bottle had started to pour and only a trickle was lost. We had taken into account, however, the added weight of three people and knew that the bottle would tip enough to drown us if the tube was left unblocked. The tube was precision-cut at a 36" diameter. Tamara Sue had just slightly wider hips. While Jeter and I graciously averted our eyes, she slipped off her clothes and began smearing her body with Vaseline. We heard her climb into the end of the tube. With a deep breath and a funny little farting sound, she corked up the bottle.

"O.K., guys," she said. "Let's do it!"

Jeter and I carefully stepped over her and onto the shunt. There was an ominous groan as the bottle tipped another two feet. We held our breath. Tamara Sue had done it! Not so much as a trickle touched our shoes. Immediately, we got to work. Jeter looped the harness over the top of the cap and began securing it while I started loosening the bolts. It was beautiful. After only five and a half minutes, the cap was lazily swinging from its new moorings. As we turned to climb back onto the framework, I pushed off of the shunt with one foot and the bottle tipped maybe six more inches.

If the sign had been lit, drivers at the intersection of Piedmont and Lindbergh might have seen a naked woman swan-dive into the tall, inviting soda glass followed closely by a torrent of something like

America's Number Two Soft Drink. The extra tilt had created enough pressure to move Tamara Sue. With a blubbing pop, she came out of that tube like a Peterbilt out of a tunnel and shot past my suspended foot. Over the edge of the shunt, her cute little rear disappeared into darkness.

"Oh Jesus!" Jeter wailed.

"C'mon, man. We gotta get down there!" I said. We flew down the ladder and ran to the reservoir.

"Help me!" It was a hollow echo.

"Tamara Sue, honey. Are you all right?" Jeter hollered.

"Keep it down, asshole!" said the echo. "You think I want the cops to find me like this? Give me a hand outta here."

We pulled her over the edge of the reservoir and lifted her down. Her hair was plastered to her breasts and back. It was a vivid image.

"Anything broken?" I asked.

"Nah, I'm fine. Think I'll stick with Coke though. That stuff tastes like poop." She hacked a little and gave Jeter a hug. "We gotta go get my clothes and get the hell outta here, babe. You promised me a moonlight cruise on the Hooch."

...

As I said before, Shasteen in a '61 Corvette was an acceptable sight. Shasteen in a junk pickup in an alley at night was altogether different.

Officer Titus Winslow was parked in the lot at Zayre's when the lights went out. He wasn't too concerned; he'd been waiting for the damn thing to fall through the roof since Day One. Still, he thought, better have a look. When he saw the pickup idling in the alley, he went on full alert. From his end of the alley, he couldn't hear anything. But when he saw the black kid pulling on a rope, he figured him for a cat-burglar. Cautiously, Officer Winslow drew his weapon and, as stealthily as a 300 pound man can, advanced on Shasteen.

"Hey, boy. Whatcha doin'? No! Don't move. Let's you jest drop that rope and turn around slowly. Real slow."

"Officer, I don't think----"

"Well no shit, Uncle Ben," sneered the cop. "Drop the friggin' rope!"

"But----"

"Now!"

We had been lowering the bottlecap a little at a time when I spotted the cop slipping up on Shasteen.

paris aubade

susan ludvigson

Breathing, the last possession
that counts, comes faster here, where
time and our oldest obsessions

make us more conscious--self conscious. The air
is completely polluted, of course, but haze
that descends on this city is like the fair

skin of Doris Day, filmed in the days
when soft light meant dropping gauze
in front of the camera. It's like that these lazy

first weeks when we stay in bed until noon, lawless
as coupling cats we hear on the balcony, late.
We inhale each morning as if the flawed

fabric of earlier lives had been laid
in a drawer, carefully folded, forever.
Yet under the net of that dream, we pay

for what we know. Bodies that flail under covers
all hours in pleasure learn to count breaths --
just after. Though the world falls away for lovers

as they make the escape into flesh,
its heavy atmosphere fills them. Clouds
are the color of nipples. Worn silk thins to mesh.

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book review

paul hodo

To Find the Gold: poems by Susan Ludvigson
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.

If you've ever spent a rainy afternoon prowling curiosity shops and galleries, you know that there is a mood that settles on you as you become a part of the pleasant clutter. You tend to become more relaxed, physically, but your senses become acute. The histories of the subjects of various works start to matter, as do the histories of the artists. The values of light and shadow and negative space are suddenly important. Even the way motes of dust hang in the air adds to the portent of the moment. It has occurred to me that the visual artist has an advantage over the writer, when the task is to translate a moment in time into a piece of work. Until I read *To Find the Gold*, by Susan Ludvigson. Within the confines of this slender collection, the poet manages to take her reader down beautifully hung hallways to rooms full of artistic treasure. In words, she creates that heightened sensate mood.

The book is divided into three parts, the first of which is a biography of Camille Claudel, the 19th-century French sculptor. In a series of letters and what appear to be journal entries, the tragic story of Claudel's seduction and betrayal, at the hands of Auguste Rodin, unfolds. The verse has bone and blood. The reader shares the pain of the artist as she loses her identity to the domineering master and, in the end, is released from his spell. In "Manna, September, 1943," Claudel writes,

I watch a parade pass by my window, a line
of statues in bronze and marble,
bodies contorted, rising
and smiling, their lives
nearly over.

Part II, which includes "Paris Aubade" (facing page), is the poet's expression of her own place in the artistic world and her willingness to sacrifice for the affirmation of its validity.

In the final part, Ludvigson exceeds even the power of the visual artist and takes her reader into the art itself. In a cycle of poems regarding

the works of Edvard Munch and other Scandinavian artists, she allows us to see the pictures move and to feel their textures. In "Nocturne," she affirms my description of mood:

The ground remembers me-
 aroma of sweet earth,
 soft fragrant hay, just cut.
 Somewhere in my bones
 a harp plays, now a flute.

Susan Ludvigson is a poet of rare grace and, in this collection, a chronicler of timeless beauty. In an art form that is so often derivative and where riches are few, it is a pleasure to note that, for her as for Claudel, "the gold she finds is truly hers."

ty burgess is an English major who will be transferring to an unspecified New York institution.

james groome is an English major, active in the English Club, and interested in drama.

paul hodo is editor of *Perceptions* and is planning to attend the University of Arizona in the fall.

alisha goodman plans to get her BSN at North Georgia College.

bridget hogan plans to attend U.G.A. and major in studio art. She loves literature.

angella kamminga will continue her education as a journalism major at U.G.A. She hopes to write for *Rolling Stone*.

joni suzanne payne is a psychology major and an avid reader of southern literature. Her story won third place in the Gainesville College Writing Contest.

ron reach is an English major who has been taking mostly night courses.

brian ross is now at U.G.A. majoring in Cultural Anthropology.

candy sains is a physical therapy major from Great Britain. She hopes to attend G.S.U.

marleen springston is a member of the English Club and an English major. She is a recovering Catholic who resides in Buford.